



News Release

For Immediate Release:

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Media Contact:

Tom Hudachko

Public Information Officer

(o) 801-538-6232 (m) 801-560-4649

After-hours media phone

801-209-2591

Plain and Simple—Use Only As Directed

New campaign targets importance of taking prescription pain meds safely

(Salt Lake City) – In 2006, more Utahns died as a result of unintentional over-the-counter or prescription drug overdoses than died in motor vehicle crashes. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) today unveiled a new education campaign meant to reduce the number of unintentional prescription pain medication overdoses in Utah by 15 percent by 2009.

Over the past few years, the Office of the Medical Examiner (OME) noticed an increasing trend in causes of death among Utah residents - overdoses of prescription painkillers. Officials did some research and determined many of the deaths were due to dosage mistakes or the fact the victims had combined the painkillers with other prescription drugs.

"We have been able to identify some of the reasons these overdoses are occurring," said Dr. David Sundwall, UDOH executive director. "Too many Utahns feel they can self-medicate as a means of managing their pain, so they aren't following the directions given by their healthcare providers. Sadly, this proves fatal in far too many cases."

The campaign slogan, Use Only As Directed, is meant to be clear and concise, assuring that all Utah residents understand what they can do to protect themselves from falling victim to unintentional overdose deaths. As the campaign rolls out, Utah residents will begin to hear radio ads, see television ads, and spot decals and posters at doctor's offices and pharmacies across Utah. The ultimate success of the campaign will be measured based on the reduction in unintentional overdose deaths that takes place in 2009.

In 2006, the OME investigated 476 drug-related deaths, more than any previous year. Nearly two-thirds of the deaths (307) were caused by legal drugs, either prescription or over-the-counter. The average age at death of legal-drug overdose victims was 42 years. Fifty-one percent of those

- MORE -

Page 2 of 2: Plain and Simple—Use Only As Directed

victims were male. There was at least one legal-drug overdose death in 24 of the state's 29 counties. The most common legal drugs associated with fatal overdose were methadone, morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, and fentanyl. Non-narcotic prescription drugs were also commonly found. Fewer than one-quarter (96) of overdose deaths were caused by illegal drugs.

The Pain Medication Management and Education Bill, sponsored by Rep. Bradley M. Daw and passed by the 2007 Utah Legislature, directed state agencies to develop a program to investigate the causes of, and reduce the deaths and harm from, the misuse and abuse of prescription pain medications. 'Use Only As Directed' is a major step in accomplishing that legislative directive.

#

The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.